

# Seven years of BAD LUCK

By Bob Van Elsberg, Fort Rucker, Ala.

**E**ver heard the old superstition that breaking a mirror will get you 7 years' bad luck? Well, superstitions are only in the mind; however, a .22 slug zipping through a bedroom mirror is a reality. And for a mistake like that, 7 years' bad luck could be a "light" sentence.

I sat on the bed in the master bedroom of my family quarters at Fort Rucker, Ala., and pulled my Ruger Standard Model .22 caliber semiautomatic pistol from its case. I had fired the Ruger earlier that week and hadn't yet cleaned it. In the back of my mind I could almost hear my granddad (who taught me to shoot) saying, "Clean it the day you shoot it!"

I dropped the magazine out of the grip and checked to see if there were any rounds in it. It was empty so I assumed that the Ruger was unloaded. I could have pulled the slide back to check the chamber, but that would have cocked the pistol and forced me to dry fire it to relieve mainspring tension. Because dry firing a .22, granddad had warned, could damage the chamber, I normally only dry fired the Ruger when I finished shooting for the day.

As I sat on the edge of the bed, I wondered if I had remembered to dry fire the Ruger at the end of my last range session. Since you couldn't tell if the Ruger was cocked by simply looking at it, the easiest way to tell was to gently pull the trigger back and see if it moved freely or stiffened suddenly. If the trigger moved freely, the pistol was uncocked. If the trigger stiffened suddenly, that was a sure sign I'd inadvertently left the pistol cocked.

I pulled back on the Ruger's trigger about a quarter of an inch when it stiffened. Because I had already checked the magazine and found it empty, I assumed the chamber was also empty. Since I couldn't take the pistol apart for cleaning with it still cocked, I pulled the trigger all the way back.

"Blam!" The Ruger went off, sending a round through the bedroom mirror. My wife ran into the bedroom to see what had happened. As I sat there shaking, I imagined with horror what would have happened had she been in the bullet's path.

When I thought about it later, I couldn't believe that I

made such a potentially deadly mistake. After all, I had been raised around guns. Granddad taught me to shoot a handgun with his High-Standard "Sport King" — a .22 pistol very similar to the Ruger. He also taught me to treat every gun as if it was loaded. And it wasn't just his voice I was hearing in the back of my head. I was an Army sergeant. How many times had I qualified with my M-16 and made sure the chamber was empty before leaving the firing line? Unfortunately, this time I thought I knew better while handling my own weapon. I found out the hard way that I didn't.

Now I live and breathe that well-founded axiom, "There is no such thing as an unloaded

gun."

Whether the firearm is a single shot, pump, bolt action, lever action, semiautomatic, or revolver, I ALWAYS check the chamber.



**"Blam!"**  
The Ruger went off, sending a round through our bedroom mirror.

And although it might sound odd, I check the chamber more than once on some firearms. I've owned lever action rifles where a cartridge would occasionally jam in the tubular magazine, only to jar loose later and slide into position for chambering.

There is a simple moral to this story — never handle a firearm without checking its chamber to make sure it is empty. I was lucky that I didn't hit anything more precious to me than the bedroom mirror — and even that didn't cost me 7 years' bad luck. However, don't count on good

luck to keep you safe around a weapon. Don't assume your privately owned weapon is unloaded and don't take the word of a friend who hands you a firearm. Accidents can happen. Don't let 7 years of bad luck — or worse — happen to you! ▶

*Editor's note: Courtesy Countermeasures Magazine*